



# Mining the Landscape:

Coal in the Illawarra

*“Mining companies now and into the future require a social licence to operate, where they acknowledge concerns and work constructively with community groups and individuals to achieve the best possible outcomes for all stakeholders involved in a project.*

*A core part of this is to acknowledge the background and traditions of mining in an area and the Mining the Landscape Exhibition does this extremely well. It demonstrates that mining is far more than just the technical topics, by showing the impact on individuals and local communities.”*

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Ray Tolhurst

UOW Honorary Principal Fellow

Mining Engineering and Deputy Chair Ilawarra AusIMM

The Illawarra landscape was appreciated early on for its picturesque qualities. It was also geologically resource-rich, with coal discovered at Coalcliff in 1797 by Dr George Bass. By 1849 the first mine had opened at Mount Keira and the shipping of coal through the Wollongong harbour commenced.

The region quickly transformed from the “Garden of New South Wales” into an industrial centre, spurred on by the need for coal to power steam engines. The Illawarra prospered due to the richness of its coal seams, and small communities popped up along the coast and within the escarpment to service mines and support development.

The tragedies at Bulli (1887), Mount Kembla (1902) and Appin (1979) brought home the dangers of working underground and the need for vigilance on the part of mine owners, workers and unions. More than 150 years later, the Illawarra continues to supply coal to domestic and overseas markets, although the pit top entrances, coke oven batteries, tramways and jetties which once dotted the landscape have now all but disappeared, washed away by raging seas or demolished and covered by dense escarpment forests.



UOW Archives holds a wide range of collections on the history of the coal industry in the Illawarra and related social and political activities. The material presented in this exhibition has been drawn from these and includes items from the Illawarra Coke Company, Bellambi Coal Company, Clark Family, Barracklough, Piggitt and Becarevic collections. Additional objects are on loan from the Illawarra Historical Society.



North Illawarra Colliery Jetty 1887-1896

UOW 1911 Private Albums, Barry Piggitt Collection, UOW Archives

# 1797

Presence of coal found  
at Coalcliff, confirmed  
by Dr. George Bass

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# 1839

Captain Westmacott  
attempts to open mine  
at Bulli

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Geologists W.B. Clarke  
and J.D. Dana investigate  
coal seams and record a  
finding of coal at  
Mount Keira

# 1849

## Captain Shoobert opens the first Illawarra coal mine at Mount Keira



Mt. Keira Colliery looking  
down from the top of the hill.

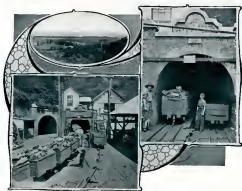


Coal from the Mt. Keira Colliery, Illawarra, N.S. Wales.  
The photograph was taken by the author in 1849.  
The photograph was taken by the author in 1849.

# 1857

Thomas Hale opens mine  
at Bellambi

First coal shipped from  
Bellambi Harbour



Entrance to Bellambi mine from The Mines of the Bellambi Coal Co Ltd c1900  
CNSC Coal Mines and Mining Heritage Collection, U.S. 60, 100000



# 1858

## Coal mining commences at Bulli



Bulli Colliery in its early days. The sketch depicts a general view of the workings around the turn of the century, 1897.  
From the Illustrated Sydney News (1900, April, 1897) p.10  
Copyright David Edgar Collection, 2010 edition



Bulli Colliery - Old Bulli Office 1914  
©2010 from the collection of the 'Sydney' City Council and Museum (Illustrated Sydney)

# 1861

Mount Pleasant  
Colliery opened

Mount Keira tramway  
completed to coal loading  
facilities at Wollongong  
Harbour



Wollongong Harbour, c1861  
© 2011 The State Library of New South Wales

# 1862

Bulli tramway and jetty  
constructed

Mount Pleasant tramway  
completed to Wollongong  
Harbour



*Building the Mount Pleasant railway siding  
Wollongong, New South Wales, 1862*

# 1863

First steam collier for the  
Illawarra SS Woniora  
commences operations  
between Bulli and Sydney

# 1865

Mount Kembla kerosene  
oil shale mine opens,  
the first in Australia  
(1865-1873)



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varra,  
pour

[illegible]

Cookhill Coke works-Construction, 1913-1914  
 1625.26.28 Western Coal Company 1918-1919

## first coal miners union

# 1882

## Mount Kembla mine begins operating



Scenery of Mount Kembla Mine  
reimagined from English historical photo archive



Charles Hill Cottage, Kembla/Rongels, which was original miners' house of the 1880s  
reimagined from English historical photo archive



# 1887

2.30pm 23rd March -  
Bulli mine disaster,  
81 men and boys killed



*Scene at Bulli Explosion 23.3.1887*  
*collection of Peter Smith*



*The Bulli Disaster 1887*  
*collection of Peter Smith*

Southern Coal and Northern  
Coal Companies build jetties at  
Austinmer and Port Kembla



*Southern Coal Co Jetty at Port Kembla, opposite loading grounds for coal, September 1886*  
*1887's Images - from the University Collection of Peter Smith*



# 1889

## Coke ovens open at Berkeley and Bulli



11.1.89 Coke works, Berkeley, 1889.  
©1998 Philip Morris Group Historical Collection. P101.10000



12.1.89 Coke works (Bulli) in the background, 1889.  
©1998 Philip Morris Group Historical Collection. P101.10000



13.1.89 Coke Works, 1889.  
The Coke Industry of New South Wales. Published by the Government Printer, 1916.  
New South Wales Department of Mines, Mineral Resources No. 30. P. 101.10000

# 1888

## Metropolitan Mine opens near Helensburgh



Metropolitan Colliery, Helensburgh  
Copyright Stuart Piggott Collection, UoW Archives

# 1900

Federal Coke Works opens  
at Wollongong near present  
day Beaton Park

Other coke works opening  
at Bulli, Bellambi, Corrimal,  
Coalcliff and Port Kembla



Federal Coke Works Wollongong



Bulli Coke Works Bulli, Bellambi



Belliambi Coke Works Bellambi



Corrimal Coke Works Corrimal



Coalcliff Coke Works Coalcliff

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# 1902

2pm 31st July -  
Mount Kembla mine disaster,  
96 men and boys killed



*The colossal wreckage following the explosion, 1902.  
Copyrighted material from media*

# 1908

Copper and Electrolytic  
smelters and refineries begin  
production at Port Kembla

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# 1910s

Cokeworks commence  
production at Corrimal  
and Coalcliff



# 1927

Work commences on  
construction of the steel  
works at Port Kembla



Partial aerial view of Port Kembla Industries, c1927-1928  
Image courtesy of the National Archives of Australia

# 1946

Mount Nebo colliery  
opens with first track  
mounted mechanised  
coal extraction

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# 1979

11pm 24th July -  
Appin mine disaster,  
14 men killed



# 1980s

Downturn in the steel industry results in widespread mine closures and increase in industrial action

**WHEN THEY CLOSE A PIT**

**THEY KILL A COMMUNITY**



**STOP THE ROT  
SUPPORT THE MINERS**

**WHO'S TO BLAME?**

**STOP THEM  
SUPPORT THE MINERS**

**PUBLIC MEETING**  
Wednesday 2nd, 10h 30m

**WHEN THEY  
CLOSE A PIT**



**THEY KILL A  
COMMUNITY**

**STOP THE ROT  
SUPPORT THE MINERS**

When they close a pit they kill a community  
NCC, National Union of Coalminers (1980)  
© 1980 NCC

# 2017

Bellambi coal mine opened in 1857. Today it is the oldest operating mine in Australia

*"Maintaining mining heritage documents and their regular display by the library is an excellent endeavour that considerably enriches the new generations of the Illawarra with its historic facts. Without the help of this exhibition, many students may not know the enormous contribution that the coal mining and steel industry have made for the region's development".*

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Professor Naj Aziz

UOW School of Civil, Mining & Environmental Engineering,  
Faculty of Engineering and information Sciences

## UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG ARCHIVES

Building 16, Northfields Ave, Wollongong  
(02) 4221 3545

UOW Archives holds a wide range of material documenting our local region's history and supporting academic and historical research. The Collection includes rare books, artefacts, documents, oral history recordings, and more. Many of these items are now digitised and can be explored at [archivesonline.uow.edu.au](http://archivesonline.uow.edu.au)

As custodians responsible for the storage, care and accessibility of the UOW Archives Collection, we welcome any support from donors towards the preservation and restoration projects. For further information on how you can get involved, please contact the University of Wollongong's Advancement Division at [donations@uow.edu.au](mailto:donations@uow.edu.au)



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